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Defence Systems & Equipment International: Lifeblood of the Arms Trade

Ian Prichard & James O'Nions

The DSEi Arms Fair 2005 will be held from 13 to 16 September in London. The world's military has been promised that it will be 30% bigger than last time, and that 'products and services related to Homeland Security, anti-terrorism, access control, and personal security' will be on display as well as the usual rockets, tanks and machine guns.

DSEi: Who Runs It?

Defence Systems & Equipment International (DSEi) is organised by Spearhead Exhibitions 'in association with' the Ministry of Defence. It is a formal relationship that exists for no other arms exhibition in the UK and, when it comes to promoting arms sales, it's a winning combination. First and foremost, arms companies want to meet buyers and that's what Spearhead and the MoD provide. As DSEi's 2005 brochure states, it delivers: 'Well-organised, top level international delegations; UK ministers and senior staff involved in UK defence procurement; Senior international visi-

tors and military influencers' In 2003 (like most major arms fairs, DSEi is two-yearly), the 973 companies from 28 countries enjoyed the 'customer-rich environment' provided by 20,000 visitors from 65 countries. In 2005, it is likely that more companies will enjoy an even 'richer' environment.

Taxpayers' Money

DSEi is heavily subsidised by the government. Direct costs alone were estimated to be £400,000 in 2003 and we cannot guess the indirect costs of the huge government support and involvement. The policing of the event was an even greater cost. Immediately after the event the government estimated police costs of around £1.7 million, saying that the final cost remained to be established. When it was established several months later, the cost to taxpayers had reached over £4 million.

Closed & Opaque

Spearhead is now owned by Reed Elsevier plc, the massive publishing group. Its Reed Exhibitions business organises six 'aerospace and defence' trade fairs including Latin America Aero & Defence, Taipei Aerospace and Defence Technology Exhibition and of course DSEi. When asked at their AGM about the ethics of organising arms fairs,

Receiving & Supplying of Major Conventional Weapons, 2000-2004

Country	AS SUPPLIERS		AS RECEIVERS	
	Rank	worth in \$mn	Rank	worth in \$mn
US	2	25,930	12	1,760
UK	5	4,450	4	3,395
France	3	6,358	60	204
Japan	not listed		23	975
China	8	1,436	1	11,677
Germany	4	4,878	33	575
Italy	11	1,252	16	1,594
Russia	1	26,925		not listed
Canada	7	1,692	14	1,675
Australia	23	165	9	2,177
NZ	54	3	59	204

Source: SIPRI Yearbook, 2005, OUP

the Chairman astonishingly said it was ok as long as 'we don't deal ourselves in these kind of things, I suppose'. When pressed again over Spearhead and DSEi, the board claimed that they were providing 'an open and transparent process'. This is a difficult claim to assess given that, as Reed Elsevier states, 'It is not open to members of the public.' You might have thought that several million pounds of taxpayers' money would buy the general public a few tickets!

The Defence of DSEi

There is nothing redeemable about the arms fair. Even DSEi and supporting organisations such as the Defence Manufacturers Association (DMA) are at a loss to know how to defend it in public. Their responses to criticisms have sunk to the desperate level of suggesting that it isn't an arms fair! However, the DSEi 2005 brochure is clear on the situation. It states that 'DSEi provides a platform for the whole of the defence and military aerospace community ...' and 'fulfils an important role within the selling process for defence companies'. Then, of course, there are the arms companies.

The Sellers

As of 17 June, there were 927 exhibitors confirmed for DSEi 2005. They include Lockheed Martin, the world's largest arms company and manufacturer of fighter aircraft, missiles, nuclear weapons, etc etc. Lockheed is joined by other massive US arms producers such as Raytheon (missiles), Northrop Grumman (radar and missile systems, warships, space systems) and General Dynamics (armoured vehicles, tanks, nuclear submarines). Then there are the major European arms companies: BAE Systems (fighter aircraft, warships, torpedoes, missiles, tanks), Thales (naval systems, avionics), EADS (fighter aircraft, missiles, helicopters) and Finmeccanica (helicopters, missiles). These companies will all have enormous stands at DSEi

and will dominate the exhibition as whole. However, there is plenty of competition for specific weaponry. There will be at least 15 cluster bomb producers present. We don't know if individual companies will be actively marketing their cluster munitions at DSEi, but they have in the past and there will be nothing to stop them this year. In terms of small arms and its ammunition, BAE Systems and General Dynamics are joined by a plethora of companies including Arsenal Co of Bulgaria, Glock and Steyr Mannlicher of Austria, FN Herstal of Belgium, Heckler & Koch, Rheinmetall DeTec and J.P Sauer & Sohn of Germany, Alliant Techsystems of the US, Diemaco of Canada, Giat Industries of France, Nammo of Norway, Helston Gunsmiths of the UK and Pakistan Ordnance Factories.

Official Invitations

Official delegations from other countries attend DSEi at the invitation of either the Ministry of Defence or Spearhead. In 2003 there were 79 official delegations from 56 countries. On more than one occasion controversial invitees appear to have been avoided by the MoD, only for Spearhead to invite them anyway, saying that they are staying within the government's guidelines. In reality, of course, the two work hand in glove over DSEi.

Israel is one example. Whilst the government are still happy to allow arms exports to Israel despite the 38 year occupation of Palestinian territories, judged illegal under international law, and well documented and serious human rights abuses including collective punishments and extra judicial killings, it appears it has not always wanted to be seen to actually invite the country to DSEi. In both 2001 and 2003 Spearhead did the job for them. Of course, given the presence of numerous Israeli arms companies as exhibitors at DSEi, the absence of an official delegation would be rather

incongruous. Of course, the UK government often isn't that circumspect about who it invites anyway. Colombia was invited in 2003, a country whose military not only have documented links with the right-wing paramilitaries who murder hundreds of trade unionists, human rights advocates and rural workers each year, but who have also carried out some of these killings themselves; 2003 also saw the Ministry of Defence invite delegations from both India and Pakistan, despite them having been on the brink of war with each other just the year before. Pakistan also was and remains a military dictatorship.

Arming Africa

Between them, the MoD and Spearhead officially invited 15 African countries over the past three DSEi exhibitions. These included Tanzania and Angola, whose very low Human Development Index ratings indicate that they are two of the poorest countries in the world. Encouraging these countries to spend money on arms hardly helps them pull themselves out of poverty, nor helps stop the continent's many armed conflicts. Even the supposedly middle income African countries who have attended DSEi, such as South Africa and Botswana, receive millions of pounds of overseas aid from the UK, and have nowhere near the resources they need to deal with the HIV/AIDS pandemic currently ravaging the continent.

A number of the African countries invited also have serious human rights problems. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office website says that in Algeria there have been 'numerous documented allegations of human rights abuses by the security forces and state-armed militias, including the enforced disappearances of at least 4,000 people, abductions, torture and extra-judicial killings,' whilst in Nigeria the FCO says that 'the Army has committed serious abuses of human rights.' Yet the MoD

invited both these countries to DSEi in 2003. The official invitation lists were not available as CAATnews went to press, but there is no reason to think that these countries and others with poor human rights records won't be invited again in 2005.

The International Arms Fair Circuit

DSEi is just one, albeit one of the biggest, of a series of military exhibitions that take place around the world. They represent 'a key event for the total supply chain' as Spearhead put it about DSEi. Other major arms fairs include Eurosatory and the Paris Air Show, both in Paris, IDEX in the United Arab Emirates and Defendory in Greece. Outside Europe, South Africa's Africa Aerospace and Defence exhibition and Brazil's Latin America Aero and Defence are also significant.

Like DSEi, some of these fairs started out as primarily national expositions to boost a particular country's arms industry. Though this function still exists, in an internationalised industry, arms fairs have increasingly become big business ventures in their own right, organised by corporations like Reed Elsevier. Similarly, the Defence Export Services Organisation's role isn't limited to DSEi; in 2004 alone it spent over £1 million attending thirteen international arms fairs, promoting UK arms exports from Malaysia to Chile to Jordan.

In a very real sense, then, these fairs are the international arms trade. They are where negotiations are conducted, collaborations planned and purchases considered. They are a key part of the machinery which keeps this abhorrent industry running, and DSEi is more significant than most. That's why CAAT will be urging all those who care about social justice, human rights and peace to join the opposition to DSEi this autumn in whatever way they can. ♦